

## **Civic Center Task Force Progress Report for December 5, 2005**

Submitted by Jan Davis, Task Force Chairman

On December 5, 2005 the Civic Center Task Force continued gathering information and heard a presentation by staff given about other facilities, both old and new in comparable cities and within the state of North Carolina.

### **Aging Civic Centers**

Information on several aging Civic Centers was presented. Roanoke, Savannah and Augusta Georgia and the Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium are all older facilities that have some similarities to the Asheville facility. With the exception of Augusta, the facilities have either been renovated to some extent or in the process of renovations. Savannah plans to move their arena to a redevelopment area, but the funding for the construction is still pending a citizen vote in 2007. Spartanburg finished a \$14 million renovation of their auditorium in 2000, which included adding on a new lobby space and a new stage and backstage area. Roanoke is in the middle of a 5 phase process, and so far they have added office space and are currently constructing additional exhibit hall space. Additionally, Roanoke has made significant renovations to their auditorium to improve the acoustics, seating and accessibility.

### **New Facilities**

Several facilities that were constructed within the last 15 years were presented. The Peace Center in Greenville was constructed in 1990 with mostly private donations. The City of Greenville readied a 6 acre site for the construction of the Center at a cost of 6 million. The Bi-Lo Center, built in 1996, is owned by the Greenville Memorial Auditorium District, a public authority, which issued Certificates of Participation to fund the construction. The North Charleston Performing Arts and Convention Center was also discussed. This center had come up several times at the November 21 meeting of the Task Force as a successful facility where two performance venues could have events simultaneously without any negative effects. The River Center in Columbus, Georgia is a relatively new performing arts center and received most of its funding from a local arts fund drive. While the Peace Center and the River Center are private non-profits, the Bi-Lo Center and the North Charleston facilities are publicly owned and use room occupancy taxes for funding their construction debt. North Charleston also uses a food and beverage tax and admissions tax to pay for their construction costs.

## **North Carolina Facilities**

An overview of North Carolina facilities revealed that a several North Carolina cities have built or are building convention centers (Hickory, Fayetteville, Raleigh, and Wilmington). Raleigh is currently building a convention center, and Wilmington is also about to break ground on a convention center on their riverfront. Greensboro's Coliseum has a fair amount of meeting space and flat floor space, but it is not a convention center per se. Raleigh is also home to the Progress Center for the Performing Arts, which has four theaters of varying sizes for different types of performances. Of the facilities that were examined, room occupancy taxes and food and beverage taxes were frequently used to fund the construction and renovations of these facilities.

More detailed information about these facilities was given to the Task Force and the audience, and can be found on the city's website, [www.ashevillenc.gov](http://www.ashevillenc.gov).

After the presentation, the Task Force made requests for more information to be brought back by staff. Specifically, the Task Force was interested in hearing more about how and to what extent accommodations taxes and other types of taxes (food and beverage taxes, sales taxes) are being used in different municipalities to fund public assembly facilities. There was also a request for more information about the operational health and governance structures of the facilities presented.

In addition to the discussion of other facilities, the Task Force discussed its schedule and producing its report. There was a general consensus that the progression of meetings would lead logically to the production of the Task Force's report to City Council.

The Task Force's next meeting will be Wednesday, January 4 at 5:30 pm in the Banquet Hall of the Civic Center. At this meeting, the Task Force will hear several presentations of past and present proposals for modifications to the Civic Center. Later in January, there will be a focused public input session. We continue to look to the citizens in our community for support and involvement. We encourage you to be a part of a renewed enthusiasm to address our Civic Center and create solution that makes us all proud.